# OPINION

BY NAWEEN A. MANGI

## Justice, Pakistan-style

WHEN we speak of justice in Pakistan, the discussion usually unfolds in courtrooms, legal reforms, constitutional clauses, and televised outrage. Rarely does it begin in villages — and yet it is there, far from cameras and commentary, that the justice system reveals its truest form.

What follows is not an exceptional story. That, precisely, is the problem.

In a rural area of Sindh, a group of politically influential men decided that community development work had crossed an unacceptable line. Their objection was not to corruption or inefficiency, but to ideas: girls attending school, women working outside their homes, women managing projects and exercising leadership. These, they declared, were signs of 'social vice'.

The first tactics were subtle. Men positioned themselves on roads used by school buses and women staff, standing in scant, obscene attire, leering and taunting. The intent was humiliation — a reminder that public space was not meant for women.

When this failed, the strategy escalated. Messengers arrived demanding that property be handed over. The implication was clear: surrender what you have built and leave, or stay at your own risk. These demands were accompanied by routine nightly gunfire. When questioned, the explanation was almost mocking — they were merely 'killing doves'.

Eventually, ambiguity disappeared. Shots were fired openly at security personnel and staff on more than one occasion. The police were approached for protection. If an officer occasionally decided to show up after a report was filed, he joked openly that they had 'received nothing', and without such incentives how were they expected to act? Corruption did not even bother to cloak itself in euphemism.

As pressure mounted and rumours circulated that the police might intervene, the accused were quietly relocated. Influential landlords provided them safe houses — places of comfort and protection — while those who had been attacked continued to live in fear. In much of rural Pakistan, justice is not decided by evidence but by proximity to influence.

Then another attack took place. A guard was fired upon. Again, formal complaints were filed. For months, letters were written — repeatedly and respectfully — to every rung of the police hierarchy: SP, SSP, DIG, IG. Not a single response was received. Silence, it seems, is also an institutional tool.

When the matter finally reached court, the last illusion dissolved. Those seeking protection were made to stand shoulder to shoulder with the very men who had fired at them. There was no acknowledgment of risk or vulnerability. Instead, the judge directed his irritation at the victims, scolding them for 'causing trouble' by forcing the accused to appear in court so often — as though persistence itself were an offence. The message was unmistakable: endurance would be punished.

Believing that a higher court might restore balance, legal recourse was pursued upward. What emerged revealed another layer of decay. The lawyers — officers of the court in theory — exploited desperation with ease. Court fees were fabricated. Costs inflated. Urgency monetised. Before the victims could even appear before a judge, they had been financially bled by those meant to represent them. There was no realistic forum in which to challenge this exploitation without inviting further retaliation. At every stage, the system closed ranks — not around the vulnerable, but around itself.

This is the anatomy of injustice in Pakistan: police compromised by corruption and power, courts dulled by hierarchy and delay, and legal practitioners operating in an ecosystem where ethics are optional and consequences rare. None of this requires conspiracy. It survives on apathy, fear and the understanding that some lives and some causes are expendable.

> Is justice a promise the state intends to honour?

We often ask why citizens lose faith in institutions. Why crimes go unreported. Why silence becomes safer than law. The answer lies in lived experience. When intimidation is met with indifference, when procedure becomes punishment, and when even the pursuit of justice inflicts harm, withdrawal becomes rational.

So where does one go next? When the police will not protect you, the courts will not hear you, and the custodians of the law profit from your vulnerability — what remains of justice then? Is it merely an idea invoked in speeches and textbooks, or a promise the state intends to honour?

For many Pakistanis working quietly at the margins, justice is no longer a destination. It is a question — asked carefully, repeatedly, and too often without an answer. ■

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BY AISHA KHAN

## Broken federalism

PAKISTAN is confronting climate change under a governance model that was not designed for systemic, cross-border crises. Floods, heatwaves, droughts and glacial melt now interact with food security, public health, migration and fiscal stability. Yet the constitutional and fiscal architecture created after the 18th Amendment disperses authority, fragments accountability and leaves the federation with too little capacity to coordinate national responses. In a warming country already facing economic stress, this model is becoming a multiplier of vulnerability rather than a shield against it.

The 18th Amendment devolved extensive powers to the provinces, abolishing the Concurrent List and making provinces primarily responsible for key sectors such as health, education, agriculture, water and environment. Devolution addressed genuine grievances about overcentralisation and provincial autonomy. However, climate change is not a sectoral issue; it is a system shock. Rivers do not respect provincial boundaries, heatwaves spread across regions, and climate-induced migration strains cities far from the point of impact. Effective climate governance therefore requires strong federal coordination, data integration, financing capacity and enforcement authority. The current system constrains this.

The National Finance Commission (NFC) Award compounds this weakness. Under the prevailing formula, around 82 per cent of the divisible pool is distributed on the basis of population, leaving the federation fiscally hollowed out. After debt servicing and defence, federal development and climate spending space is minimal. This means Pakistan negotiates international climate finance, adaptation funds and loss-and-damage commitments without the domestic fiscal leverage to co-finance, scale or sustain them. Provinces, meanwhile, often lack technical capacity, long-term planning frameworks and incentives to invest beyond electoral cycles.

Visible consequences include the 2022 floods with losses exceeding $30 billion, cutting across Sindh, Balochistan, Punjab and KP. Yet response and recovery were uneven and despite shared basins, water governance remains weak. Inconsistent standards for early warning and data platforms are not failures of intent but of structure.

Deforestation and its wider national implications are other emerging concerns. Does provincial autonomy give subnational governments the right to put at risk the lives of communities in other parts of the country? The scale of deforestation in KP, GB and AJK and its impact in 2025 on downstream communities is another example of the devastating consequences of this disconnect. The 18th Amendment and the NFC Awards should therefore not only be seen as institutional arrangements but as a moral and ethical compact designed to facilitate cooperative governance and not mini power centres for serving political agendas.

Provincial scale is another overlooked constraint. Punjab alone governs a population larger than most countries, while Balochistan's vast territory poses administrative challenges. Oversized provinces dilute accountability, centralise power in provincial capitals and struggle to deliver services in peripheral regions. Climate impacts disproportionately hit those peripheries — riverine belts, arid zones, coastal districts — where governance is weakest.

Pakistan does not need to abandon federalism; it needs to rebalance it. Revisiting the 18th Amendment does not mean recentralisation but rationalisation. Climate, water, disaster risk reduction and interprovincial infrastructure should be treated as shared competencies with clear federal leadership. The NFC Award must be reconfigured to include criteria such as climate vulnerability, geography, revenue generation and performance, while restoring sufficient fiscal space to the centre to govern effectively.

> Climate change is not a sectoral issue.

Equally important is administrative reform. Creating smaller, more manageable provinces or empowered regions would bring government closer to vulnerable communities, improve service delivery and allow tailored climate responses. Smaller units enhance oversight, reduce elite capture and align planning with local ecological realities.

Under a changing climate, governance structures are not neutral. They either absorb shocks or amplify them. Pakistan's current model, designed for political balance rather than planetary stress, is increasingly misaligned with reality. Without structural reform, climate change will continue to expose the fault lines of a fragmented federation, weakening the state and making disasters costlier. Survival now necessitates thinking beyond politics as usual. ■

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## FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

### 1976 | Fifty years ago

### RCD collaboration

**LAHORE:** The Planning Council of the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD), at is first plenary session … today [Jan 26], considered the report of the Coordination Committee on regional collaboration in various economic and cultural fields. Mr V.A. Jaffery, Secretary, Pakistan Planning Commission, presided over the meeting. Welcoming the Iranian and Turkish delegation, Mr Jaffery spoke of the collaboration between Iran, Pakistan and Turkey in the framework of the RCD and reiterated Pakistan's strong commitment to regional cooperation. "It will be our endeavour … to accelerate every form of economic and social cooperation between these three countries," he said. — News agencies

[Meanwhile, as reported by our staff reporter,] Mr. Hatim A. Alavi, 77, a former Mayor of Karachi, a close associate of Quaid-i-Azam, and a prominent leader of the Pakistan Movement, died of heart failure yesterday morning [Jan 26] at Mauritius… . He had gone to perform Haj. From there he proceeded to Africa and was returning home via Mauritius when he suffered the fatal heart attack… . All KMC offices were closed in the afternoon as a mark of respect to the memory of the former Mayor.

### 1951 | Seventy-five years ago

### New plan?

**LAKE SUCCESS:** Diplomatic sources said yesterday [Jan 25] that the UN Security Council will open discussion of the Kashmir question possibly before the end of January and Bharat will propose that the whole matter be settled outside the UN in direct talks with Pakistan. The sources said that the Security Council President, Antonia Quevedo of Ecuador, would be requested by Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Chaudhri Mohammad Zafrullah Khan, and the British Delegation to call a meeting for early next week. Should this prove impossible because of the pressure of work of the Political Committee of the General Assembly on Korean problem, the Kashmir question would come up for discussion in the first few days of February. — News agencies

[Meanwhile, according to news agencies from Dacca,] The strike which was proposed to be resorted to by doctors in Government service in East Pakistan ... has been called off... .

The decision by the doctors not to go on strike, it is understood, is in response to the appeal issued by the Chief Minister, Mr Nurul Amin ... pointing out the undesirability of adopting the course which the doctors had threatened with.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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*Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.*

## Indian 'supremacy' is an absolute myth

THE economic comparison between Pakistan and India is usually presented through simplified narratives, headline figures and powerful propaganda in which India is portrayed as a 'rising global economic powerhouse', while Pakistan is depicted as a perpetually failing economy.

When this comparison is examined beyond slogans, the picture becomes far more complex and far less one-sided. The fact that India's economy is larger than Pakistan's is often used to construct the myth that size alone equals strength and prosperity, whereas, in reality, India's massive gross domestic product (GDP) is largely a function of its enormous population, and aggregate numbers conceal deep structural weaknesses, extreme inequality and widespread deprivation.

Per capita income, quality of life, access to healthcare, education, sanitation and social protection are routinely pushed aside in favour of celebrating trillion-dollar milestones, even though hundreds of millions of Indians continue to live without basic necessities. India's growth story is heavily concentrated in services, particularly information technology (IT), finance and digital platforms. These are sectors that benefit a relatively small, urban, English-speaking elite, while vast rural areas remain trapped in agricultural distress, debt cycles and underemployment, as evidenced by recurring farmer protests and alarming rates of agrarian suicides.

Manufacturing has failed to transform India into a true industrial powerhouse, as its share in GDP and global exports remains limited, supply chains remain fragmented, and job creation has lagged far behind the needs of a young and rapidly growing labour force.

Pakistan has historically maintained a more balanced economic structure in which agriculture, industry and services have played meaningful roles. Although deindustrialisation and policy inconsistency have weakened this balance in recent years, sectors such as textiles, agriculture-based exports, surgical instruments, sports goods and IT freelancing generate real foreign exchange and employment.

Another widely promoted myth is that India's economic success is driven by massive foreign direct investment, but a closer look reveals that significant portions of these inflows are concentrated in portfolio investments, stock markets, real estate and digital platforms. These are areas that inflate valuations and enrich corporations, but they do not necessarily translate into any broad-based industrial growth or large-scale job creation.

In contrast, Pakistan's foreign investment inflows are modest, but initiatives, such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), have focused on tangible infrastructure, energy capacity, and regional connectivity. Long-term economic returns are yet to fully materialise, but are structurally bound to be more productive than speculative capital flows.

Income inequality represents one of the most serious but among the least discussed vulnerabilities of the Indian economy, where a small group of billionaires controls a disproportionate share of the national wealth.

Pakistan does face severe poverty and inflationary pressures, but social cohesion supported by family networks, remittances from overseas workers, and a large informal economy has so far prevented the kind of extreme polarisation that is visible in India.

Defence spending is another area where India is portrayed as economically superior. The worth of this spending was seen by the world during last year's conflict.

However, the greatest myth is the notion of permanent failure on one side, and inevitable success on the other, when in reality both countries struggle with structural inefficiencies, governance challenges and vulnerabilities embedded in the global economic system.

It is India's strong international lobbying, strategic partnerships and influential media networks that help mask internal weaknesses and project an image of unstoppable ascent. Pakistan's weaker diplomatic and communication capacity had often allowed crises to dominate international headlines. But all that has now changed as well.

The real question is not which economy is bigger, but which economic model is capable of delivering inclusive growth, social stability and long-term resilience. Measured by these standards, India's growth appears flashy, uneven and exclusionary, while Pakistan's economy, though fragile and mismanaged, retains room for reform, recovery and reorientation. Understanding this distinction is essential to dismantling myths about Indian economy and confronting realities.

***Mian Iftikhar Ahmad***
Faisalabad

## Venezuela tensions

THE relations between the United States and Venezuela have never been of friendship and trust. Venezuela, an oil-rich nation of 29 million, has always preferred its independence and sovereignty over diplomatic slavery and economic dictation. Relations went worse when Hugo Chavez, the socialist former president, developed close ties with Russia, China and Iran. He ousted the two largest US oil companies from Venezuela, deepening the fissures.

Allegedly, the US supported a failed coup against Chavez, who had been a lead campaigner in Latin America for trade and ties with China. Trade volume between Latin America and China had surpassed the $500 billion mark.

USS Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group, named after the 38th US president, is lurking along Venezuelan waters in the north while Trump is thumping his chest in Washington. It is the largest aircraft carrier in the world with 90 aircrafts on board. It is escorted by several other vessels, including USS Mahan and USS Winston Churchill. In addition, there have been more vessels reported in the area, including submarines.

In case of direct strikes against Venezuela, it is likely that people will present a solid unified response against the aggressor. Venezuela is not isolated diplomatically either. It has a vibrant nation and dependable economy. Trump needs to play his cards cautiously, or his pride may sink in the Caribbean Sea.

***Farrukh Shahab***
Lahore

## Karak neglected

KARAK district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) has emerged as an important contributor to country's energy sector due to the discovery and production of significant oil and gas reserves. This development has undoubtedly benefited both federal and provincial governments by strengthening national energy production and reducing dependence on costly imports. However, it is unfortunate that despite producing large volumes of oil and gas on a daily basis, the area remains deprived of even basic facilities.

Many households in the district still do not have access to natural gas. Moreover, there has been little visible improvement by KP government in terms of local infrastructure. Roads are in a poor condition, educational institutions lack resources, and the state of public hospitals is distressing.

The local people rightly feel aggrieved that while their land fuels the country's energy needs, they continue to live without adequate health, education and development facilities. As a result, public frustration has spilled onto the streets, with protests recently leading to the closure of the Indus Highway, causing inconvenience to commuters and traders alike.

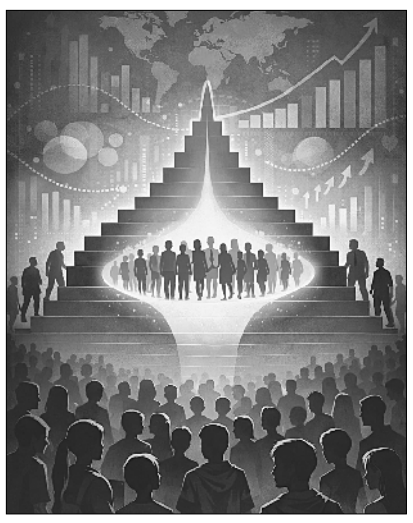
It is imperative that both Islamabad and Peshawar address all these crucial grievances by improving schooling systems, upgrading hospitals and roads, and ensuring the provision of natural gas to households in Karak.

An equitable development is essential for national cohesion. Resource-rich areas must not be left behind while contributing so much to the country's overall progress.

***Arbab Ur Rehman***
Karak

## The youth bulge

THE current dynamics of the country do not indicate a rising economy for at least the next five years. That being so, the number of young people entering the workforce, at the rate of 3.5 million per



year, is a reality that needs to be addressed. We need should opt for bold initiatives to accommodate the national youth bulge. Older employees need to make some room through voluntary retirement. Lowering the retirement age, from 60 to 58, in some sectors of the industry will create job opportunities for the youth. The only impact foreseen by this reduction of retirement age is the slight increase in pension.

While developed countries are enhancing the retirement age due to their aging populations and the shrinking numbers of young people, developing countries cannot imitate them as their demographic characteristics are different.

Extensions in service and post-retirement contracts should be banned in government organisations. The solution lies in streamlining succession planning at the organisational level. Bringing the youth into the mainstream of productivity is more important than pleasing the senior citizens.

***Lt-Col (retd) Raza Kamal***
Karachi

▶ **WAKE-UP CALL:** The recent happenings in Iran should serve as a wake-up call for Pakistan. The poor and middle classes are already feeling the heat of escalating prices of daily-use commodities and life-saving medicines. The upward stock exchange trends are of little value to those who can hardly manage to put meals on the table. Political instability is also adding fuel to the fire, and the opposition is waiting for a trigger to take advantage of the situation. How long will the government hide behind the successes made by our armed forces?
***Malik ul Quddoos***
Karachi

▶ **NARROW ROAD:** The Murree Road remains one of the most troublesome roads for commuters owing to almost constant traffic jams. The primary cause is illegal parking and commercial occupation of roadsides that have reduced several lanes to a single narrow track. Parking plaza projects at key locations, like Raja Bazar and Fawara Chowk, remain either incomplete or insufficient, forcing thousands of motorists to park their vehicles directly on the main road. Ambulances get stuck and cannot reach the hospital in time. It is rather sad to see emergency vehicles unable to move through crowded areas, like Chandni Chowk and Liaquat Bagh. Immediate and effective action is required before lives are lost due to avoidable delays.
***Muhammad Anus***
Rawalpindi

▶ **MANHOLE TRAGEDIES:** This is with reference to the report 'Another boy drowns in open manhole in Mehran Town' (Dec 30). The grieving father mentioned that the boy was his only son, and that the manhole had been left uncovered for over a month. According to the Edhi Foundation, 29 people lost their lives last year after falling into open manholes. While it is important to highlight the negligence of local town committees and the provincial government, a more proactive approach is needed. The community should come together and raise funds to purchase proper manhole covers and prevent further tragedies.
***K.M. Shafi***
Karachi

**External Ombudsman**

Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is *Dawn's* External Ombudsman (DEO). His duty is to attend to our readers' complaints, and to respond to them professionally. DEO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is DEO who takes notice of any alleged violations of *Dawn's* code of ethics, and informs the Editor for appropriate action.
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